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MEMORIAL

OF THE

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE,

OF THE

City of New-York.

Printed by order of the Senate of the United States.

January 24th, 1803.

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SEYMOUR DURST

FORT NEW AMSTERDAM (NEW YORK), 1651

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In Senate of the United States.

JANUARY 24th, 1803.

Mr. Morris presented the Memorial of the chamber of commerce of the city of New-York, which was read.

Ordered, That it be printed for the use of the Senate.

Attest, SAMUEL A. OTIS, *Secretary.*

To the honourable the SENATE *and* HOUSE *of* REPRESENTATIVES *of the* UNITED STATES.

THE MEMORIAL OF THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF THE CITY OF NEW-YORK,

RESPECTFULLY SHEWS—

THAT your memorialists view with much alarm the renewal of an attempt to repeal the acts making discrimination between American and foreign duties on imports and tonnage, and pray leave to submit to the consideration of Congress the following objections.

FIRST.—It will diminish the revenue to an amount which, taking past years as the guide, would not be less than 450,000 dollars per annum.

SECONDLY.—It will eſſentially injure the commerce of the United States, as its effects will be, by opening the market for freight to the loweſt bidder, to ſhift the carrying trade from the hands of our own merchants into thoſe of foreigners. This your memorialiſts believe will appear from the following conſiderations:

Firſt.—Foreigners build their veſſels much cheaper than we can do. From actual calculation it is found that a veſſel built of European oak, and equal to thoſe built of our live oak (which, beſides, is nearly exhauſted) coſts, when equipped for ſea, at the rate of 36½ dollars per ton; and if built in Finland, of their fir, of which they have abundance, equal in duration to our common oak, and fitted for ſea in the ſame manner, ſhe will coſt at the rate of 19 dollars per ton: while the American veſſel, built of our common oak, and not ſo well equipped, will coſt at the rate of from 40 to 45 dollars per ton; but if built of live oak and cedar, ſhe will coſt at the rate of from 50 to 55 dollars per ton.

Secondly.—The materials compoſing equipment, ſuch as iron, hemp, ſail-cloth, &c. are all cheaper abroad than they are here, and the price of labor for working them is ſuppoſed to be 50 per cent. leſs there than in the United States.

Thirdly.—Foreigners navigate cheaper; ſeamen's wages are lower, and many of their crews conſiſt of apprentices without wages. The apprentice-act

of Great Britain renders it incumbent on every owner or maſter of a veſſel to take with him a certain number of apprentices, and this they find ſo advantageous, that they frequently double or treble that number; more eſpecially veſſels from the north of England. Every merchant engaged in commerce knows that the Hollanders, Hamburgers, Danes, Swedes, &c. man their veſſels with a ſtill greater proportion of apprentices: and in the cheapneſs of their living, clothing, &c. they have a very material advantage over the veſſels of the United States. Thus it appears that foreigners can build cheaper, equip cheaper, and ſail their veſſels cheaper than we can: and it may be added that Europeans are generally ſatisfied with a leſs gain than the American merchant can afford to receive.

Laſtly.—Although it has been ſaid that for us to meet the advance on the part of Great Britain, and to repeal our countervailing acts, would place the two nations on an equal footing, yet your memorialiſts conceive that while Great Britain retains her preſent navigation act, this would be very wide of the truth. We, on our part, ſhould thus permit Great Britain to bring hither not only goods, the growth or manufacture of that country, but of all others; while on her part, by the navigation act we have juſt referred to, we ſhall be expreſsly confined to the carriage of goods the growth or manufacture of the United States. To this may be added, that

British veſſels would then bring a freight from their own country to this; take a freight here to their colonies, where our veſſels are not admitted, and from thence a third freight home, making thus three freights in one voyage. The value of the importation cargoes is ſo much greater than the value of our exportion dutiable cargoes, that the extra duties paid by the foreigner are in many caſes equal, and in ſome caſes more than equal to the whole freight; ſo that the acts now propoſed to be aboliſhed, operate nearly as a prohibition to the foreigner, and leave us, in a meaſure, without competitors in our own market.

After all that has been ſaid, it hardly needs to be added that if our ports are thrown open to foreigners on the ſame terms with our own veſſels, as by this repeal is contemplated (for it is in vain to attempt to confine the meaſure to the Britiſh) they will crowd our wharves, underbid our freight, monopolize the markets, and leave the American veſſels idly to rot in our docks. Your memorialiſts have, therefore, no heſitation in declaring that, in their opinion, this meaſure will be a fatal blow to the American carrying trade.

It would be eaſy to ſhow in the detail that this would, in its conſequences, prove extremely injurious to the agricultural and mechanical claſſes of our citizens; a few general obſervations only will be indulged.

First.—As to the agricultural.

Although, generally ſpeaking, freight is paid by the conſumer, and, therefore, it may be ſaid it is immaterial to the farmer how high or how low it may be, yet this is not the caſe, when the demand ceaſes or ſlackens; it then falls back on the huſbandman. But to transfer our carrying trade to foreigners will be to leſſen very much the chance of the demand. The active enterprize of the American merchant is conſtantly looking abroad to every part of the world for a market, and if it is any where to be found, or if there is only a reaſonable preſumption that it may be found, the farmer meets with a ready vent for his produce. Perhaps the calculations of the merchant may be diſappointed, and he even ruined, yet the misfortune reaches not the farmer; he has the ſame benefit of a good market. But ſhould the American veſſels once diſappear, he muſt then lie entirely at the mercy of chance adventurers for a market, and when the demand is not very great the price of the freight will be deducted from the article itſelf. All this muſt neceſſarily tend eſſentially to leſſen the value of the farmer's produce.

Secondly.—As to the mechanical.

That numerous claſs of mechanics who are connected with ſhip-building; the carpenter, the blackſmith, the ſail-maker, the rope-maker, &c. will of

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courſe be deprived of employ; their labor will be neither wanted nor paid for.

To conclude: Our ſhips being thus baniſhed from our ſhores, we ſhall no longer furniſh a nurſery for our ſeamen, but that valuable claſs of citizens will be driven to ſeek for their bread in other countries; and in any future European wars which may happen, and which are conſtantly liable to happen, we ſhall find ourſelves without ſeamen or ſhips to avail ourſelves of that neutral poſition, which reflection and experience equally warrant us in calculating upon as one of the bleſſings allied to our remote and ſecure ſituation.

On the whole: Your memorialiſts cannot refrain from expreſſing the belief with which they are ſtrongly impreſſed, that to repeal the diſcriminating laws which have operated ſo happily to increaſe our navigation and commerce, would be a meaſure highly prejudicial to various and important intereſts in the community, detrimental to the revenues of the country, and, in a national point of view, extremely impolitic.

They, therefore, pray that the repeal may not take place.

New-York, 15th January, 1803.

JOHN MURRAY, PRESIDENT.

J. H. LAURENCE, SECRETARY.